

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

**Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 16, 2002**

**CONTACT:
Dena Graziano (202) 226-6888**

CONYERS HAILS SENATE PASSAGE OF ELECTION REFORM BILL

Congressman John Conyers Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement after today's Senate passage of the "Help America Vote Act of 2002" by a vote of 92-2:

"I would like to commend the Senate for joining the House in passing this landmark election reform legislation.

The 2000 Presidential election taught us that the legitimacy of our democracy and the ability of the governed to give their consent is in serious jeopardy. That year it has been estimated that up to 6 million votes were discarded due to defective voting equipment. 47 percent of voters with disabilities encountered physical barriers or had trouble getting to the polling place. In Florida in 2000, African-American voters were nearly 10 times as likely as whites to have their ballots discarded. Voters in low-income, high-minority districts were more than three times as likely to have their votes for president discarded as voters in high-income, low-minority districts.

That is why 18 months ago, Senator Chris Dodd and I introduced the most comprehensive election reform bill in Congress and the minimum standards in this bill are derived from that legislation. We believed that states should not be able to opt out of reform and leave voters to the whims of state and local officials. Many told us we were crazy, that we were dreaming that such a bill would ever pass Congress.

Today, despite the nay-sayers and the lack of leadership on this issue from the White House, we achieved our goal in protecting voting rights for all Americans. The bill makes the promise of the most fundamental right of citizenship, the right to vote, a reality for many citizens.

It will:

1. Guarantee that the punchcard machines that disenfranchised thousands of poor and minority voters are discarded in the dustbin of history.
2. Provides critical safeguards by allowing any individual found not to be on the voting list to cast a provisional ballot that will be counted if it can be confirmed that the voter was indeed eligible.
3. Voting sites will be accessible to persons with disabilities so that those individuals may vote privately and independently.
4. This bill also provides for \$3.9 billion in federal funds over three years to permit the states to upgrade their voting equipment, train poll workers and otherwise comply with the new law.

This is not a perfect bill and the voter ID provision and citizenship checkoff box are not ones I would have wanted. This Member will be following very closely how the States and federal government implement these new powers. However, all things considered this bill is an excellent first step in protecting the cherished right to vote."

